

□ 1515

BIG OIL COMPANIES LOOTING THE AMERICAN PUBLIC

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before when I reserved my right to object, I think that this debate should have been going on before we passed the bill, not after we passed the bill. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this, but this should have been part of the debate.

Mr. Speaker, there is looting going on. We know there is looting going on. You can turn on your television and see looting going on. But the real looting that is going on is the looting of the big oil companies, looting the American public, picking the pockets of the American public.

It is unconscionable that gasoline prices in a matter of days have been spiked 30 to 50 cents a gallon. This is price gouging on the part of the oil companies. There is no way that the disaster in the Gulf States could have been reflected so quickly with an upswing of prices at the pump. There is no way, except for greed and price gouging.

Big oil companies should stop the looting of the American people. When the price of a barrel of oil goes down, it takes a month or two to be reflected at the pump. Why, then, is it quite the opposite when disaster hits? Why is there an immediate increase in the price of gasoline?

How dare the oil companies use this disaster to line their pockets. How dare the oil companies use this tragedy to get richer and to stick it to the American people. The American people demand answers and want to know why they are being forced to pay so much for gasoline.

This Congress and the President should do everything possible to bring down the cost of gasoline. If it means releasing the strategic reserves, as I have been calling for for months and the President says he will do, we should do that, and then some; and we should call on the oil companies to put back some of their profits into helping the American people bring down the cost of gasoline.

Now, of course, I support this legislation. Of course, we must help the people of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. As a New Yorker, I am appreciative of how the country responded after September 11. We need that kind of response today.

Why were these things not in place before the hurricane happened? We knew the hurricane was going to happen. Why did we not have food and clothes and water and all kinds of things for the people? Why is it still, days and days later, taking time to evacuate people? Why are there dead bodies floating around? What is the administration doing about this? Govern-

ment has dropped the ball and heads should roll, quite frankly, because it is unconscionable that we are standing by and not responding properly or effectively enough.

I flew over the tsunami. I flew over Indonesia and I saw the devastation there. It is one thing to have devastation in a Third World country, as terrible as it is; but in the United States of America in the 21st century, days later, for people to be there stranded without water and food and shelter, it is unconscionable.

Again, how dare the oil companies take advantage of this and raise the price of a gallon of gasoline so that the American people during Labor Day and after are suffering. It is shameful that they are using people's misery in three States to line their pockets and spike the price of gasoline for the entire American public.

Mr. Speaker, the other issue involves us weaning ourselves off foreign oil. Local gas stations in New York and elsewhere and in places outside of the Gulf Coast supply lines have gasoline. Their suppliers and shippers have gasoline. So why are prices going up so much?

Again, it is simply price gouging by the giant oil companies. I realize that gasoline is priced on a futures market and that gas prices today reflect what is expected in the future. But it is bad enough that this Congress passed an energy bill several weeks ago that did nothing to help the American people in terms of bringing down the price of gasoline. So now Congress has a challenge not only to help the victims of Katrina, but to help the American people with this spike in gasoline prices.

For years I have been talking about the need to wean ourselves off oil because we have to rely on the sheikdoms that are either unstable, unfriendly to the U.S. or even supporters of terrorism.

Now we have another reason to wean ourselves off foreign oil. So much of our economy is based on oil, and when Mother Nature gets grumpy, it sends us into a tailspin; and the oil companies use the tragedy of hundreds of thousands of hurricane survivors as cover to extract more profit from our constituents.

This cannot stand. We need to improve the fuel economy of passenger cars and SUVs to a level our advanced technology makes possible, not issue CAFE standards, as the administration did last week, which do nothing to improve fuel efficiency.

We need to make America the world's leader in energy technologies, not rely on the inefficiencies of the past. We can do this. I am currently forming a bipartisan Oil and National Security Caucus to highlight the danger of our over-reliance on oil.

But in the end we will never end our addiction to oil and never break the grip of the oil companies unless we act now. So I call on this Congress to come up with solutions which are already

there to wean us off foreign oil, and I believe that this Congress needs to take action now.

Now, provisions and assistance should have been on the ready, as I mentioned before, so that as soon as this storm moved on, the food, water, medical supplies and personnel, military and civilian, would be on their way. We must not ignore the mistakes that have been made. We must fix them immediately and learn from them for the future. We must help the people immediately.

Let me finally say that the priority of this Congress and this administration has been tax cuts, tax cuts and tax cuts; and this is a result of it. We do not put the money where we need to put the money. We do not put the money into infrastructure. We do not do the kinds of things to prevent disasters from happening again.

Priorities cannot only be tax cuts and war; priorities must be helping the American people, first in Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama, and then taking strong steps to wean us off foreign oil.

EXPRESSING SORROW TO VICTIMS OF HURRICANE KATRINA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. RUPPERSBERGER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. RUPPERSBERGER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join all Americans in expressing our great sorrow for those who have lost loved ones in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and our outrage for those still suffering in the South. This is a real crisis, and Americans are in need. These people, many of whom are most vulnerable, have lost everything. Now they are losing hope.

President Bush has called the response "not acceptable." This must change now. It is not about Democrats or Republicans; it is about helping our fellow Americans in their darkest hour. This is not the time for excuses or blame. Our country has the means to rescue and care for these people; and we must do it quickly, before more lives are lost.

First, we need to address their very basic needs. We need to get food, water, and medical supplies to the thousands of people desperately waiting for it at shelters like the Superdome and the convention center in New Orleans. Rescue workers also need to get a handle on who is trying to survive out on their own in flooded areas across Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. We need to send out the National Guard and local police in skiffs, boats and helicopters to locate these people, street by street and house by house, rescue them and bring them to a safe location where supplies are waiting for them and reconnect them with their loved ones. One national database needs to be set up for family members searching for survivors once they have been brought to safety.